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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing appreciation of the significance of motivation in human behavior. "Achievement motivation" stands out as a useful construct for study in the area of motivational research along with the closely related concept of "fear of failure." Many view these two constructs as two sides of the same coin, but research has shown that there are usually negative correlations between these two constructs or no significant correlation at all. Research cited here indicates that teachers may possess some of the characteristics of achievement motivation and fear of failure simultaneously. The most promising explanation for this condition is that there are two dimensions to most motivational constructs: need and value. In existing theory, only need has been considered. If it is discovered that indeed motives have both need and value components, then the work for researchers ahead will be even more complex than was once believed. (MM)

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ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AND FEAR OF FAILURE IN TEACHERS

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The study of "achievement motivation" has been the foremost activity of motivation researchers, and it remains the only well-explicated area of motivation research. Need for achievement was first discovered by Murray (1938) as a personality variable, and later developed as a motivational construct by McClelland and his colleagues (1953). In recent years, the area of achievement motivation has again come under careful study, and some of the assumptions that were taken for granted twenty years ago are now being challenged. Achievement motivation research is being criticized for using only one type of experimental subject, for inappropriate instrumentation, inadequate scoring methods, and invalidity. The reconsideration of this area of research provides us with a fascinating glimpse of research criticism and the result of uncritical acceptance of research findings.

The controversy surrounding the achievement motivation construct is a healthy one, which is illustrative of the process of "normal science", described by Kuhn (1962). In the monumental study of achievement motivation (McClelland et al., 1953), the transformation of personality traits into so-called "motives" began. Through this work and the elaboration by Atkinson (1957, 1964), these personality variables became critical elements of motivation theory. The

motives become the stable personal factors in motivation, while situational variables change in value from task to task. In most theories, including those of McClelland and Atkinson, the personality, or motive, factors ultimately determine the strength and direction of resultant motivation. Thus, the critical role of these variables requires that they be carefully validated. In general, this has not been the case.

Most motives are measured in similar ways to other personality variables. Most frequently the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), developed by Murray (1938), is used. In this test, subjects are shown a number of pictures and asked to write stories about them. In motivation TATs, subjects are prompted by such questions as: "What is happening in the picture?" "What is going to happen?" "What are the people thinking?" In the achievement motivation TAT, the stimulus pictures are normally in the form of slides, and they depict males in achievement-related situations. However, the situations are ambiguous enough that they are open to differential interpretation. The pictures, however, are extremely middle-class, appear dated today, and only display men in typical male roles. It is not surprising to report that these stimuli have yielded non-consistent results with women or minority group subjects. In fact, these instruments have been validated only with traditional subject-pool subjects, college freshmen and sophomores, predominantly males. The idea of the TAT instrument is that the pictures will trigger achievement imagery in those who are achievement-oriented. The more achievement imagery the higher the diagnosed achievement motivation.

More recently, prompted by the pioneering research by At-

kinson (1957, 1964), researchers have studied the flip-side of achievement motivation, fear of failure. According to the theory developed by Birney et al. (1969), the fear of failure individual attempts to escape from achievement-oriented situations, because of their fear of failing in those situations. In general, need for achievement and fear of failure have been shown to be orthogonal to one another. The following lists describe some of the primary characteristics of people who possess these motives.

Need for Achievement	Fear of Failure
Self-confident	Concerned about catastrophic events
Independent	Defense-oriented
Non-conformist	Anxious
Likes to set own standards	Prefers not to compete
Low in anxiety	Conforming
Strives for improvement	Fearful
Resistant to environmental pressure	Prefers very easy tasks or very difficult ones
Encourages precise performance measurement	
Prefers tasks of intermediate difficulty level	

Thus, it should be apparent that these persons have very little in common. Occasionally, research has shown these motives to be negatively correlated, but generally there is little reliable correlation between them.

My own interests in the diffusion of innovation in schools has led me to the study of the personality factors that might affect diffusion, both positively and negatively. It seemed reasonable to assume that achievement motivation might affect diffusion in a

facilitative manner, while fear of failure would affect it in an inhabitative manner. These hypotheses are well supported in the literature (see Spitzer, 1975). To the surprise of many, a correlational study of need for achievement and fear of failure in teachers yielded a coefficient of correlation of +.76.[1] Subjects were all practicing teachers engaged in required graduate courses in order to gain permanent certification. In an attempt to explain this result, the author consulted a number of authorities in the area of achievement motivation and fear of failure (Teevan, 1976). It was easy to explain the reasons for teachers being high in fear of failure. In general, the following characteristics appear to hold true for the members of the profession:

1. Teachers are security-oriented
2. There is little proof of teacher effectiveness
3. Teachers are the object of continual criticism and little praise
4. Teaching is still generally viewed as a second-choice profession
5. Teaching is still viewed as a part-time job by many
6. There is a lack of validated competencies
7. There is easy entry into the profession
8. There is a lack of collegial cooperation
9. Evaluation tends to be punitive

One would think that these characteristics would lead to high fear of failure and insecurity. This is what most research, including the current study, has found. However, I also discovered that these persons possessed a high level of measured achievement motivation. These results were consistent for both male and female subjects.

The Need-Value Hypothesis

A most appealing explanation for the high-need for achievement and high-fear of failure in teachers, as operationally defined by the TAT instruments, is that motives might have both need and value components. This possibility has been discussed by Clarke (1973). It may well be that in some cases the achievement motivation TAT measures need, while in other cases it may measure value. It is not surprising to believe that most every member of our achievement-oriented society would value achievement, even if they do not possess personal needs for it. This hypothesis was investigated in a follow-up study.

Subjects were given an objective value checklist. The emphasis of the instrument was on determining the extent to which the teachers considered themselves to have the traits generally attributed to those with high achievement motivation. Teachers described themselves in the following ways (with frequency of response in parentheses):

original (73), conventional (9), undecided (27)
aggressive (45), passive (21), undecided (42)
adventurous (57), timid (21), undecided (31)
experimenting (47), cautious (28), undecided (34)
original (73), conventional (9), undecided (27)

The results do tend to indicate that subjects do view themselves as possessing achievement-oriented characteristics. This tends to support the need-value hypothesis. Teachers may well possess "value of achievement" and not "need for achievement," which may

explain the high positive correlation found. There is no reason to believe that value of achievement and fear of failure need to be orthogonal or negatively correlated.

What is apparent is that there needs to be a great deal more study of motivational variables before they will have predictive validity of a high order. Certainly, the early research on achievement motivation has provided a foundation of knowledge about human motives, but it has been accepted too uncritically. It is essential that we study these motives more deeply, and in relation to other motive clusters that may interact with them or confound them. Human motivation is no clear cut topic and the full complexity of the subject is just beginning to be recognized. If we do find that motives have both "need" and "value" components, then the work ahead will be even more complex.

In terms of the practical importance of studying such motivational variables, the understanding of target groups for the diffusion of innovation is particularly critical. Achievement motivation and fear of failure, although still ill-defined, appear to be useful constructs to study. However, a great deal more research is needed before we can tender any practical suggestions with confidence. Fortunately, today, there is an increasing appreciation of the significance of motivation in human behavior and the need for further study. Motivation can no longer be viewed only as a mysterious intervening variable.

NOTE

1. This study was undertaken at the State University of New York at Albany. All subjects were graduate students in the Department of Educational Communications. N=109. This research was supported by the Research Foundation of the State University of New York.

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